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Peace Corps Educating Pregnant Mothers about Malaria

Peace Corps Volunteer Kelly Sawyer, supported by the President's Malaria Initiative (under the auspices of USAID and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control), works with local community health workers to prevent cases of malaria in pregnancy in Takaungu, Coast Province. Takaungu has almost 6,700 people, and the community had almost 1,100 cases of malaria and at least three confirmed cases of malaria in pregnancy in 2012.

Kelly, accompanied by a community health worker, regularly visits pregnant women in their homes to check up on the pregnant woman and provide education and counseling about preventing malaria. The importance of attending antenatal care clinic, getting doses of sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) every 4 weeks after quickening (called intermittent preventive therapy in pregnancy) and sleeping under a long-lasting insecticide treated bed net are emphasized. Kelly has followed 11 pregnant women in Takaungu since mid-November and will continue weekly visits over the course of these women's pregnancies.

Each year, approximately 1 million Kenyan women who become pregnant are at risk of getting malaria. Pregnant women are especially susceptible to malaria. Malaria can result in devastating effects on the health of the mother and baby including maternal anemia, premature delivery, low birth weight and death.

The Kenya National Malaria Strategy recommends two main interventions to prevent malaria in pregnant women: use of long-lasting insecticide treated bed nets and intermittent preventive therapy with at least two doses of SP in malaria endemic areas. Pregnant mothers receive a free bed net during their first antenatal care visit at public health facilities and doses of SP at each visit during the second and third trimesters. The President's Malaria Initiative procured 2.7 million bed nets for distribution through antenatal clinics and supported the training of over 400 health workers on malaria in pregnancy in 2012.

